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AUTHOR Penfield, Elizabeth F.
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ABSTRACT

In Louisiana, the state rated fiftieth in literacy, racism has been legitimized under an educational credo. The Louisiana legislature has established requirements for teacher certification that are insidious and far-reaching, among them laws that affect an undergraduate education major's curriculum, academic standing, student teaching experience, and certification. Legislation requires, for example, that education majors take courses in teaching reading and have three hours professional counseling on careers in teaching (without funding positions to teach those sessions), and that education majors possess a minimum overall grade point average that is higher than that required of science majors and achieve a specified score on the National Teacher Examination (NTE). The effects of such legislation are that enrollment is increased in upper level and graduate courses to free sections, that could be converted to reading courses, that group counseling sessions with panel presentations are substituted for individual counseling where meaningful evaluation could occur, that tracks are ironically set up by the minimum grade-point requirement in an academic unit that has always mainstreamed its students, and that the number of certified black teachers is effectively reduced due to the method used to determine the passing level on the NTE. The legislatively mandated changes have discouraged majors, overloaded the curriculum, and created instability within the profession, and they will have covert racial implications as long as "separate but unequal" rules teacher preparation in Louisiana. (AEA)

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Elizabeth F. Penfield
University of New Orleans

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POLITICS AND TEACHER PREPARATION: TROUBLE AND TRANSITION

Say "Louisiana" to someone, and immediately various images spring to mind: New Orleans and its old world charm; bayous and Spanish moss; Creole cuisine and superior seafood; the Longs (Huey, Earl, and Russell) and their political machine; Mark Twain and the mighty Mississippi. But there's another side to Louisiana, and a hard look at its educational systems provides a good, though depressing, perspective. Start with the fact that out of all the states Louisiana rates fiftieth in literacy, add to that fact a racial history of quite separate but totally unequal education, and then consider twenty-three years of smoldering resentment over the Brown decision. While the segregation schools--Dixie Academy, Delta Heritage--have for the most part fallen by the wayside and the white flight to the suburbs has slowed, racism remains, but this time legitimized under an educational credo. Parents, who are mostly white and therefore mostly voters, cry "Back to Basics!"--the slogan that has given the Louisiana Legislature carte blanche to tinker with the schools. Competency testing and accountability are two obvious results, but the changes in requirements for teacher certification may be even more insidious and far-reaching. When the legislature lays down the laws for teacher certification, politics then determines the curriculum; trouble soon follows, and transition, a polite term for instability, reigns. I hope that by describing what has occurred in Louisiana, by tracing the more subtle forms of political interference and racism, some of you from other states will be able to see what may be coming your way and can

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head it off before it becomes education's version of Frankenstein's monster.

In the past twenty years, the school population has changed drastically across the nation. In Louisiana, for instance, the impact of the Brown decision has radically altered the racial makeup of public schools if not of the cities as well. Back in 1960 in New Orleans, the city recorded 49% white births, 51% black.[1] Black children grew up and went to black schools with predictable names--George Washington Carver, Booker T. Washington--where they were taught by black teachers who held degrees from black universities, Grambling and Southern; white students went to white schools--Franklin and Jefferson--where they were taught by white teachers who held degrees from the old teachers college system or from LSU. The civil rights actions and court orders that followed the Brown decision changed all that. In 1977 the city recorded 27% white births, 73% black.[2] Even though the school population is predominantly black, most of the schools show a racial mix, and only the hard core ghetto schools, predictably Carver and Booker Washington, still have student populations that are 100% black. The faculty though mixed has in an important way stayed the same. Although the white universities began accepting black students in 1958, most black teachers are still graduates of predominantly black institutions. Both Grambling and the Southern University System have resisted integration, their alumini joining a bizarre coalition that includes Black Muslims and Klu Klux Klanners, to retain the universities' racial identity. But separate is not equal, and that fact is augmented by the rarely mentioned but strongly held belief that black teachers who hold degrees from black institutions have had an inferior education. And, of course, one can't overlook the just as rarely mentioned but just as strongly held prejudice that black people are incapable

of benefitting from a good education. And here is where "back to basics" develops racial overtones. To get back to those basics, it is necessary to have good teachers. Good, for many people in Louisiana, means white.

To see how the Louisiana Legislature worked out this equation, I will examine a number of legislative acts that were passed in the summer of 1977, the year when both House and Senate got involved in teacher preparation. That summer, they passed laws that affected an undergraduate education major in four areas: curriculum, academic standing, student teaching, and certification.

Now everybody knows that it is necessary to get "back to basics" because Johnnie (who ever he is and who cares about Jennie) can't read or write, add or subtract. But even the Louisiana Legislature had the wisdom not to tackle all of these areas and settled for one--reading. As of fall, 1977, all education majors, no matter what field, have to take courses in the teaching of reading, nine hours for elementary ed. majors, six for secondary. While the requirement is indeed sound in theory, coming as it did, instantly and from on high, its initial effect was negative. All of a sudden, indeed between the end of the 1977 summer legislative session and the beginning of the fall 1977 semester, universities had to prepare for the requirement by realigning their hiring priorities. If the majors had to take reading, then some one had to teach it. At the University of New Orleans, this meant hiring two people who could teach the course and then readjusting the fall schedule to offer the classes. Needless to say, the legislature didn't give the universities any money for new positions, so that adding the courses without adding to the staff or to the total number of courses and sections offered meant running up the enrollment to 35 or 50 in upper level and graduate courses. That then freed a course that could be converted into reading methods. Had the profession been involved in the

drawing up of this requirement, it would have been possible to lessen the immediate impact on the universities, an impact that was at best disruptive at worst destructive. What happened, one wonders, to the universities that had no positions to fill, none that could be reassigned to reading? Who taught the course?

At any rate, courses in how to teach reading are now required, and in the long run that is a Good Thing, in fact right in line with the NCTE's "Statement on the Preparation of Teachers of English and the Language Arts." So is another new requirement. The NCTE "Statement" calls for teachers to have knowledge of" the relations between students' learning of language and the social, cultural, and economic conditions within which they are reared."[3] Presumably, that is what the Legislature may have had in mind when they required that all education majors must "undergo three clock hours of counseling related to the suitability and aptitude of the student for teaching and the availability of jobs both geographically and by subject area, conducted by non-teacher education personnel."[4] Translated, this statement means that each education major must receive three hours of professional counseling to assess that person's aptitude for teaching and to provide a realistic overview of the job market and the stresses related to teaching. With this law, the Legislature told the education departments what their students had to have but also told the universities that they were not to provide it (notice the deep distrust implied by "[to be] conducted by non-teacher education personnel.") Once again, the state did not provide any funds to implement the change in curriculum. As a result, any positive effect in the way of one on one counseling that would provide a meaningful evaluation of a prospective teachers' "suitability and aptitude for teaching," that would place the prospective teacher's attitude within the context of his

her students' probable "social, cultural, and economic conditions," is impossible. Instead, each semester the education majors gather together on a Saturday morning for three hours to hear a panel composed of teachers, counselors, and school administrators try to paint a picture of the real world, what ever that is. For many, this counseling session reinforces the horror stories about inner city schools, horror stories that float around any large department or college of education. The real world is composed of schools where there are always jobs no matter what major, schools in poverty-ridden areas where violence, absenteeism, and lack of motivation abound. These are the predominantly black schools.

A subtle and unintentional form of racism also comes in with the changes the Legislature has decreed in their definition of good academic standing. As of fall, 1977, all education majors must possess a minimum overall grade point average of 2.2 (4.0 scale) to be admitted to the College of Education, and they must attain a minimum 2.5 grade point average to be eligible to student teach and to graduate. While these cut-offs have brought about an ironic situation in which the grade requirements are higher in education (traditionally a soft academic area) than in science (traditionally tough), it has even more ironically set up tracks in the one academic unit that has always mainstreamed its students. Say "track" to our Dean of Education and he turns purple. Nonetheless, some 25% of our present majors are now headed for a noncertification, degree-only curriculum, a figure that may fall to 15% as the grade point requirement goads students to apply themselves more vigorously to their courses.[5] While the overall effect of the grade point requirement should be to produce more highly trained teachers, the tightening up will be a myth, for the magic numbers 2.2 and 2.4 will differ

from one institution to another. Sure, the numbers stay the same, but those numbers mean one thing, for example, at LSU, another at Grambling. A bright black student with a shoddy educational background who runs into academic trouble at the University of New Orleans need only go two miles down the road to Southern University in New Orleans. Nobody wins.

Some attempt to even things out, however, was in the minds of the Legislature when they changed the student teaching requirements. The law mandates now, starting in the sophomore year when the education major must spend five clock hours in an "actual classroom situation," that the student spend a minimum of 270 clock hours of student teaching with at least 180 hours of actual teaching. And a "substantial portion of the 180 hours of actual student teaching [is] on an all-day basis." This requirement is coupled with another: "students must complete field experiences in schools of varied socio-economic and cultural characteristics."[6] Again, while the surface intent of these laws is sound, being right in line with the NCTE "Statement," their implementation has raised problems. The University of New Orleans already required close to 270 hours of student teaching, but the law had only demanded 90, so that any university that followed the minimum had a huge readjustment to make, and universities in predominantly rural areas had a problem transporting their students to outlying schools in order to provide the varied experience now required. The nature of student teaching has also changed. In the past, many hours could be spent observing a master teacher; now that it no longer possible. But all these problems would be offset if these changes lessened the shock of transition from one side of the desk to the other, if teachers-to-be received a positive and realistic introduction to the actual world of teaching. In reality, I suspect it's business as usual. No state agency is charged with policing the universities, and while we may all want to believe that they are honorable, that we

are honorable, experience would tell us otherwise. Do predominantly white universities place their student-teachers in predominantly black schools and vice versa? Nobody knows for sure. Yes, the Board of Regents has started to review all degree programs, but they start with the Ph.D. and work down from there. To date, no undergraduate programs have come up for review, and even when they do, what control has the Board of Regents over private colleges and universities?

An even larger question is how you measure the quality of a university's program. Performance on the National Teacher Examination will indicate something about the academic end of the curriculum, but it cannot measure the practical side. And here is where the biggest issue lies. As of September 15, 1978, all education majors must "pass an examination in English proficiency, pedagogical knowledge and knowledge in the area(s) of specialization as a prerequisite to the granting of a [teaching] certificate."[7] So says the Legislature. The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education then compounded the problem by stating that the examination will be the National Teachers Examinations (ETS). The passing level was then determined by using the previous years' average score minus one standard deviation. The only trouble was that the NTE had never been required, and therefore only the strongest students volunteered to take it. When the NTE was required and that cut-off used, the first results were devastating: only 53% of those who took the test passed it. Those results are even more upsetting when viewed in terms of race: while passing rates at predominantly white public universities ranged from 82% to 45%, at predominantly black universities it ranged from 17% to 2%.[8] That was the first time the test was given; the second time wasn't much better.[9] As long as teaching is linked to certification and certification is linked to a passing score on the NTE,

Louisiana's dual system of higher education is not going to produce many black teachers.

Of course, there are ways around the NTE, particularly in a state so political that it is referred to as the last of the banana republics. Anyone who is denied a certificate may appeal to the State Board of Education, which is chaired by an elected Superintendant. If the appeal is turned down there, on to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, fondly known as the BESE board, 8 of which is elected, 3 appointed by the Governor. Occasionally the minutes show so-and-so granted a certificate upon appeal. One person who recently applied for certification by the Board is a white male who has been on probation, never qualified for student teaching, had less than a 2.0 in his major, and failed the NTE--by some 150 points. Another appeal was made by a black woman who was certified in Illinois, had successfully completed all requirements, and was applying for certification in Louisiana. His appeal was approved; her was denied.[10]

And then there's the issue of the NTE itself. While it can measure something, what is it that it measures when an honors graduate can fail it and a student from the same university who could not attain a high enough average to be able to student teach can pass it?[11] Certainly the NTE does not measure English proficiency if by that term we mean the ability to write effective English, for it does not require a writing sample. Editing, proof-reading, spelling skills--yes; writing--no. As for the other areas, all one needs to do is examine, so to speak, how the test was made up. Each Louisiana university chose a given number of faculty members to review the test items, going over each one to see if it suited the content of the courses in the curriculum. As is often the case in testing, the point was which item to use, not whether the

item should be there or not; as a result the test ends up measuring what can be tested as opposed to what should be tested. Whatever the NTE is, it is no bar exam.

So there we are in Louisiana, fiftieth in the nation in literacy, and if the legislature has anything to do with it, there we will remain. We are indeed in transition--between bad and worse. And some of it could be worse. New Mexico's legislature, for instance, recently passed a law requiring every teacher (not education major) to have three hours in the teaching of reading--no grandfather clause, no tuition waiver, and no off-campus courses from the University of New Mexico.[12] And we could be better. Georgia has its universities set the competencies for their majors, construct the curriculum around them, and then test them.[13] Not so Louisiana, where we are about to face a politically provoked educational crisis. While the legislature cheerfully believes the problem is solved, in reality it is greater, though only the tip of the iceberg--the black reaction to the NTE results--is showing. Within the next few years, Louisiana will have a shortage of teachers, of black teachers in particular. The legislatively mandated changes have discouraged majors, overloaded the curriculum, and created instability within the profession. And as long as the NTE determines who shall teach and what information is essential to teaching, the NTE will rule the undergraduate curriculum, which will, in turn, focus on the test, not the classroom. The practical side of the program will suffer. The immediate effect of the changes will not necessarily be better teachers, but will be fewer teachers, most of whom will be white. "Back to basics" will continue to have subtle and covert racial implications as long as "separate but unequal" rules teacher preparation in Louisiana.

NOTES

[1] Katherine G. Keenun, ed. Facts and Finances 1978-79 (New Orleans: New Orleans Public Schools, 1979), p. 46.

[2] Ibid., p. 46.

[3] "A Statement on the Preparation of Teachers of English and the Language Arts." (Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1976), p. 5.

[4] Milton L. Ferguson, "Teacher Certification Requirements." New Orleans: College of Education, January, 1978.

[5] Personal interview with Gloria Borello, 24 October 1979.

[6] Personal interview with Milton L. Ferguson, 10 October 1979.

[7] Ferguson.

[8] Allan Pursnell, "Only 52.8% of Louisiana Students Passed First Round Teacher Tests," Baton Rouge Advocate, 15 February 1979, Sec. 1, p. 1.

[9] While 72% passed the examination last spring, the passing rate at predominantly white public universities ranged from 85% to 62%, at predominantly black universities from 13% to 0. "Most Grads Pass Exam for Teachers," States-Item 23 June 1979, Sec. , p. .

[10] Borello.

[11] Borello.

[12] Borello.

[13] Ferguson.